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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed 100 married mothers in Sao Paulo, Brazil, who live in their own house with an average of three rooms, work 40 hours a week, and who have 3- or 4-year-old children in public day care centers or preschools. The survey focused on family characteristics, child rearing practices, responsibility for child care and household, and day care availability. The study found that in regard to child rearing practices, the mothers valued routine, honesty, organization, and freedom of speech (despite ambiguity expressed by mothers about their children's autonomy) most highly. The survey also found that 45 percent of the mothers reported performing the household and child-rearing chores on their own, while 35 percent reported sharing these responsibilities with their husband; by contrast, fathers participated more in cultural, social, and educational tasks than mothers. Although the mothers were generally pleased with the public day care and preschool their children participated in, they felt that the government could do more in providing economic support to families with young children and improving living conditions. (MDM)

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MODERN FAMILY IN CONTEXT: THE CASE OF BRAZIL

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OBJECTIVES

The present work originated from a research entitled European families in the 90's - The International Extension conducted by Professor Göran Lassbo from the University of Göteborg, Sweden, in which Brazil participated together with other European and non-European countries.

The survey investigates the situation of the families in the society nowadays having as a panorama the changes present in the past few years that have affected Europe and the rest of the world and manifested in various sectors and influenced the way and the role of the family.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

The ecological theory of human development by Uris Bronfrenbenner (1979,1989) was used as a theoretical frame that contributes to this research. According to the author, human development cannot be studied outside the social and cultural context. The environment is defined as an integrated system that has ecological levels: macro, exo, meso and micro. The microsystem refers to the immediate relations established in the environments closer to the person in interaction. In the case of a small child, the most meaningful environments would be the home, the day care center or the pre-school. The combined effects of these environments form the second level, the mesosystem. The exo and macro levels exert an indirect influence on the human development. The working conditions of the parents, the planning of the public services, and the economical conditions restrict or amplify the oportunities of the families and affect the potential development of the children.

METHODS

The methodology used took into consideration the preocupation of Bronfrenbenner to gather information in the natural environment of the interaction among people and investigate how they perceive the situation. Thus, Lassbo elaborated a common questionnaire to all the countries that were involved in the research, having as samples 100 married mothers (or living with their partners) with children ranging between 3 or 4 years old who went to public daycare centers or full time pre-schools. It covers the following items: 1. characteristics of the family; 2. child rearing practices; 3. responsibility for child and household; 4. form of day care offered to the child; 4b. ideal day-care/pre-school and 5. relations between the family and the state policies.

In Brazil, the sample was limited to the state of São Paulo covering day care centers linked to Education, Social welfare and universities. The option for day care centers and not pre-schools is due to the fact that only public mainly day care centers function full time.

RESULTS

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FAMILIES

The families that participated in the sample are characterized by having 2 or 3 children, living in their own house with an average of 3 rooms, having incomplete first grade and working 40 hours a week.

2. CHILD REARING PRACTICES

This part of the questionnaire aims to evaluate the mothers' opinion in relation to child rearing practices. The most valued aspects were: organization (77%), routine (87%), freedom of speech (71%) and honesty (87%). The autonomy appears in a contradictory way in the opinion of the mothers. While the majority values the child's freedom of speech to express their opinions (71%), about half is divided between valuing the freedom of the child at choosing their activities (56%) and the adults taking initiative (52%). The

same way, around 62% think that children should always ask before doing anything and 87% believe that to tell the truth is very important for children of this age. These results seem to reflect the predominance of the heteronomy, especially in respect to the moral dependence in the relationship adult-child.

3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD AND HOUSEHOLD

The results indicate a predominance of the mothers (45%) in the performance of the household which entails physical care: changing nappies, dressing, feeding, looking after sick children, putting the child to bed and giving a bath, it was noticed a significant percentage of work on shares between fathers and mothers in the performance of the tasks (35%).

In the cultural, social and educational tasks such as: reading, singing, playing (inside and outside), traveling, driving or escorting children to places, helping the children with school work, teaching new things and comforting, it was noticed a considerable participation of the fathers in work shares (31%), overcoming the average of the mothers (28%) who assume alone such activities.

The presence of the fathers are felt more in: playing with the children outdoors (16%) and indoors (14%), helping the children with school work (10%), putting the children to bed (10%), comforting the children (13%) and singing (13%). A great percentage of the mothers (37%) answered that taking the children on trips was not applicable to the situation of their lives. Women are ahead in almost all of the household activities; 48.9% of these activities are done by themselves and 20.14% are shared. Mending clothes (82%), washing (72%) and ironing (72%) are predominantly feminine tasks, whereas fixing things (59%) and looking after the car (32%) are masculine ones.

4. DAY CARE FORM AND IDEAL

4a: Child care versus family situation

In general, mothers are pleased with the child care offered which is evident in the following items: location (85%), costs (87%) [1], the size of the group (98%), the work hours (71%), trust in the staff of the day care (94%), and preference for the day care as opposed to the home (68%) [2]. The questions that deal with the relation between day care center and family show that 99% of the mothers value the contact between day care center and home and 90% think they are well informed about the activities at the day care center. However, 88% would like to be more involved with the planning, 78% would prefer to visit the day care center more often, 89% feel responsible for what happens at the day care center and 77% would like to have more influence in the institution.

4b: Ideal day care/pre-school.

All the items in this part were considered important to the mothers, which demonstrates that the listed items were included in the ideal day care. Among the items we can point out: safe environment (93%), emotional security (80%), specialized staff (80%), readiness for the school (76%), food (72%) , learning things that the mother cannot teach (71%) and playing (70%). These results indicate that mothers value the various features of the institutional practice, which includes the integration between the caring and the education. The value given to play, at the same level as to preparing/ readiness for school suggests lack of knowledge about the meaning of both categories in the constitution of the pedagogical work in a child care and education setting.

[1] In Brazil the public nurseries are free.

[2] It is important to point out that the sample only included the full time nurseries. If part-time pre-schools were included, the results would probably be different since they follow the school calendar and the proportion adult and child is high.

5. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND STATE POLICIES

In general, we noticed a great dissatisfaction in relation to the participation of the state as for offering services to support the needs of the families. Among the items which show a percentage above 50% we can point out the ones which underline the total lack of participation of the state: economic support to the families with young children (76%), control over children's well being within the family (53%), good living conditions to the citizens (59%), advantages to the families with children (54%), facilitate the condition of the parents (52%), offer the same opportunities of education (53%) and assume the responsibility in the caring of the child (52%).

CONCLUSIONS

The results show a family outline in the state of São Paulo with alterations which are reflected in the relations family/state/society. On one hand, we see a more significant presence of the fathers in the share of household tasks; on the other hand, there is a strong absence of the state in offering a political support to the family.

We also notice a significant satisfaction as for the caring offered by the day care center. This fact suggests that a policy of child care through full-time programs better caters for the necessities of the modern family. However, in the ideal day care, mothers demand a greater participation in the activities.

In an ecological perspective, this research makes us aware that the consolidation of a policy to the childhood should be in accordance with the necessities and ideals of the family in a modern society.

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